

Message Text

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ACTION EB-08

INFO OCT-01 NEA-11 ISO-00 SOE-02 AID-05 CEA-01 CIAE-00
COME-00 DODE-00 DOE-15 H-01 INR-10 INT-05 L-03
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P R 251337Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1291
INFO /AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI 3977
USINT BAGHDAD POUCH
AMCONSUL DHAHRAN
AMEMBASSY DOHA
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY MANAMA
AMEMBASSY MUSCAT
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PFOR, ENRG
SUBJECT: OIL FIRES IN KUWAIT

1. KUWAIT OIL COMPANY ANNOUNCED JUNE 24 THAT A FIRE HAD BROKEN OUT THE NIGHT BEFORE AT AN EXPLORATORY DEEP WELL IN THE BURGAN FIELD. SENIOR OIL MINISTRY TECHNICAL AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL WHO VISITED THE FIRE TOLD US THERE WERE NO CASUALTIES BUT THAT THE FIRE COMPLETELY DESTROYED THE LARGE DRILLING RIG WHICH US FIRM, PARKER DRILLING CO., WAS USING TO DRILL KUWAIT'S FIRST DEEP (20,000 FT) WELL FOR NONASSOCIATED GAS. OFFICIAL EXPLAINED TO US THAT DRILLERS HAD RUN INTO DIFFICULTY AT 9,800 FT LEVEL WHEN THEY HIT OIL AND ASSOCIATED GAS AT VERY HIGH PRESSURE. TO COMPENSATE FOR THIS SITUATION THEY HAD TO INTRODUCE HEAVY MUD AND TURN

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OFF THE BLOW-OUT SAFETY VALVES ON TOP OF THE DRILL. THE MUD DID NOT WORK, THE PRESSURE SUDDENLY INCREASED AND BEFORE THEY HAD TIME TO TURN THE SAFETY VALVES BACK ON, THE WELL BLEW. THE FIRE IS STILL BURNING AND MAY DO SO FOR MANY WEEKS. OUTSIDE HELP MAY HAVE TO CALLED IN TO PUT OUT THE FIRE.

2. OUR SOURCE FELT THERE WAS ABSOLUTELY NO POSSIBILITY OF

SABOTAGE BUT CONCEDED THAT THE FIRM HAS LED TO A SENSE OF UNEASE AT THE MINISTRY, COMING ON TOP OF A STILL UNEXPLAINED OIL RESERVOIR FIRE, WHICH BURNED FOR THREE HOURS MAY 22 IN AN OIL STORAGE TANK AT MINAGISH, A STORAGE/PRODUCTION AREA NEAR THE POINT WHERE THE SAUDI AND KUWAITI BORDERS AND THE SAUDI/KUWAITI PARTITIONED ZONE MEET. LATTER FIRE DESTROYED 18,000 BARRELS OF OIL AND DID DAMAGE AMOUNTING TO ABOUT \$1.8 MILLION. OIL MINISTRY OFFICIALS WHO VISITED SITE OF MINAGISH FIRE TOLD US THEY COULD FIND NO EVIDENCE OF SABOTAGE BUT HAD NO ADEQUATE EXPLANATION FOR WHY THE FIRE BROKE OUT. THEY SPECULATED THAT RELEASE OF HYDROGEN SULFIDE PRODUCED BY IRON RUSTING IN THE VERY HOT ENVIRONMENT MAY HAVE CAUSED MINAGISH FIRE.

3. COMMENT: DESTROYED DRILLING RIG WAS A HIGHLY SPECIALIZED, MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR, PIECE OF EQUIPMENT WHICH WILL TAKE MONTHS TO REPLACE. BEFORE FIRE, PARKER DRILLING WAS ALREADY MONTHS BEHIND BECAUSE OF VARIOUS TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED; DRILLING CONDITIONS HAD BEEN SO BAD THAT MINISTRY HAD CONSIDERED ABANDONING SITE AND DRILLING ELSEWHERE. RIG'S DESTRUCTION AND FIRE IS LIKELY TO PUT BACK KUWAITI EFFORTS TO FIND A SOURCE OF NONASSOCIATED GAS BY AT LEAST A YEAR. THIS WILL BE A BLOW FOR THE KUWAITIS, SINCE FINDING NONASSOCIATED GAS IN COMMERCIAL QUANTITIES WOULD PROVIDE THEM WITH A SOURCE OF ENERGY FOR ELECTRICITY AND DESALINATED WATER PRODUCTION INDEPENDENT OF OIL PRODUCTION.
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FINDING NONASSOCIATED GAS WILL TAKE ON ADDED SIGNIFICANCE AFTER EARLY 1979, WHEN THE 3.5 MILLION TON PER YEAR LPG PROJECT'S COMING ON STREAM MAY LEAD TO A SHORTAGE OF ASSOCIATED NATURAL GAS FOR ELECTRICITY/DESALINATED WATER PRODUCTION.
SUTHERLAND

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